

Most Difficult Language To Learn

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Most Difficult Language To Learn



Many people ask the question **what is the most difficult language to learn?** In that regard, many languages have been claimed to be the hardest language to learn, below are some candidates, for a good reason. However you need to consider other factors that might make a language especially difficult for YOU, those factors can determine how hard or easy you will be able to learn the next language. Make your choice of what's the **hardest language** to learn after reading through this article, you can also comment. Don't forget to **bookmark** this page!



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Most Difficult Language To Learn

Overview: **Arabic, Cantonese, Japanese** are said to be the hardest, based on the approximate learning expectations compiled by the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) of the US Department of State. **Finnish, Hungarian, and Estonian** are also among the hardest because of the countless noun cases. The Pronunciation is even harder than in Asian languages as they usually have long tongue twisting consonants. However the list doesn't stop there.

This is a list of the 10 candidates, with an explanation why they made it to this list. If you think other languages should be included too, please comment at the bottom.

1) Chinese: Many factors make Chinese very difficult to learn. For example the characters (Hanzi) used in the writing system seem to be archaic and obscure. Every word is a different symbol and it's not phonetic so it gives you no clues as to how it is pronounced. The tone system also is a pain because Mandarin has four tones. One other reason is, Mandarin has a large number of homophones. For example, the pronunciation "shi" is associated with over thirty distinct morphemes. Some people try to learn this language for that specific reason, being difficult and different.

2) Arabic: The first challenge is the script. Most of the letters have four different forms, depending on where they stand in the word, also, vowels are not included when writing. The sounds are tough, but the words are tougher. An English-speaking student learning a European language will run across many familiar-looking words, but English-speaking Arabic students are not so lucky. Arabic is a VSO language, which means the verb usually comes before the subject and object. It has a dual number, so nouns and verbs must be learned in singular, dual, and plural. A present-tense verb has thirteen forms. There are three noun cases and two genders. The other problem is dialects. Arabic spoken in Morocco is as different from Arabic spoken in Egypt and from Modern Standard as French is from Spanish and Latin.

3) Tuyuca: a language of the eastern Amazon. Tuyuca has a sound system with simple consonants and a few nasal vowels, so is not as hard to speak. However it is heavily agglutinating. For example one word, "hóabāsiriga" means "I do not know how to write". It has two words for "we", inclusive and exclusive. The noun classes (genders) in Tuyuca's language family (including close relatives) have been estimated at between fifty and 140. Most fascinating is that Tuyuca requires verb-endings on statements to show

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how the speaker knows something. Diga ape-wi means that "the boy played soccer (I know because I saw him)". English can provide such information, but for Tuyuca that is an obligatory ending on the verb. Evidential languages force speakers to think hard about how they learned what they say they know.

4) Hungarian: First of all, Hungarian has 35 cases or noun forms. That fact alone makes it a candidate in this list. Hungarian is full of very expressive, idiomatic words, and suffixes. The high amount of vowels and their deep-in-the throat sound makes it very hard to speak as well. It takes more effort to learn it and maintain what you learned than most other languages.

5) Japanese: One main reason why Japanese is so hard is that the written code is different from the spoken code. Therefore, you can't learn to speak the language by learning to read it, and vice versa. What's more, there are three different writing systems to master. The kanji system uses characters borrowed from Chinese. Students need to learn 2,000 to 3,000 of these characters through rote memorization; there are no mnemonic devices to help. Written Japanese also makes use of two syllabary systems: katakana for loan words and emphasis, and hiragana for spelling suffixes and grammatical particles. The State Department allows its students three times as long to learn Japanese as it does languages like Spanish or French.

6) Navajo: This fascinating language can be the most difficult as well. During World War II, the language was used as a code in the Pacific War by bilingual Navajo code talkers to send secure military messages over radio. This had the advantage of being an extremely fast method of encrypted communication. The code was never broken by the Japanese, who were mystified by the sounds they intercepted. Navajo was not chosen as a code language only because it is very hard but also because there was no published grammar or dictionary of the language and because native speakers were readily available. Nearly everything that a language must do is done differently by Navajo than by English. For example in English, we only mark one person on the verb--third person singular, present tense (I read -- > he reads) with a suffix. Navajo marks all of the persons with a prefix on the verb.

7) Estonian: This language makes the list too. Estonian has a very rigid case system. "Case" is a grammatical system under which words inflect based on their grammatical function in a sentence. There are twelve cases in Estonian, more than two times the number of cases that exist in most Slavic languages. Apart from the fact that Estonian has many cases, this language is also hard because it has many exceptions in grammar rules, also, many words mean several different things.


8) Basque is also up on top based on a study made by the British Foreign Office. The Basque language has 24 cases. It is impossible to link Basque with any Indo-European language. Basque is probably the oldest known spoken language in Europe. Basque is called an agglutinative language, meaning it likes to use suffixes, prefixes and infixes, so new words are frequently formed by adding a common tag onto the end or the beginning or in the middle of a simpler word. Basque is synthetic, rather than analytic. In other words, Basque uses case endings to denote relationships between words. Basque doesn't just change the end of the verb, it changes the beginning too. In addition to the Indo-European languages moods, Basque also has a few more moods (ex. the potential) and, finally, Basque has a complex system of denoting subject, direct object and indirect object - all of which are crammed into the verb itself.

9) Polish: This language has seven cases and Polish grammar has more exception than rules. German for example has four cases all of which are logical. Polish cases however seem to need more time and effort to learn the logical pattern (if any) or rules; you might have to learn the entire language. Polish has seven cases and Polish grammar has more exception than rules. German for example has four cases all which are logical, Polish cases seem to have no pattern or rules; you have to learn the entire language. Furthermore Polish people rarely hear foreigners speak their language, so with no accent or regional variation, pronunciation must be exact or they will have no idea what you are talking about.


10) Icelandic is a very hard language to learn because of its archaic vocabulary and complex grammar. Icelandic kept all the old noun declension and verb conjugations. Many Icelandic phonemes don't have exact English equivalents. The only way you can learn them is by listening to recordings or to native speakers.

But here is something you should know. The more different a language is from your own (in terms of characters, grammar ...) , the harder it might seem to you to learn it. One more element should be

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considered in deciding which language is the most difficult: whether a language follows a logical pattern in its grammar, for example, in English, there is a general rule for creating plurals, adding "s" or "es". In Arabic on the other hand, the plural is irregular most of the time and non-native students spend much of their time learning how to use it.

Finally, one thing is certain, no matter how hard a language is, you really need three things that are essential for learning it: adequate and appropriate learning resources, understanding of the way you learn, and passion of learning.

You can also check our other articles about the [Easiest Language to Learn](#) and the [Best Language to Learn](#), or other important resources in many languages here: [Learn Languages](#). Don't forget to [bookmark](#) this page.

Comments:

Japanese shouldn't be on that list! It's not that hard! A language is as hard as u want it to be ;D saying a languages is hard without knowing the language itself is wrong! even if a part of a language takes more time than other parts to learn, doesn't mean it's hard... x) I think korean then should swap places with japnese.. korean reading and writing is easy, but orally speaking and understanding can be hard, while japanese is just the opposite! ;P

Posted by [Line](#) on Fri, February 4, 2011 7:33:51 PM

When considering which foreign language would be easier or more difficult for yourself, you must also remember that language is not only pronunciation but the whole pattern of thinking and formulating thoughts. Therefore for example a person from Estern Europe may find more difficult to learn assian or african languages, whereas it will be easier with arabic family...I myself would put Nepali up tehre as Hannah said...and Polish - do not get put off. I am sure if you will try and get it wrong everybody will understand. There are many different accents in Polish and once you learn how to read, you are one third way there! :)

Posted by [Maya](#) on Sat, January 22, 2011 10:34:27 PM

I think that Lithuanian language is also one of the hardest to learn, especially for native English speakers. First of all, spelling and pronunciation is diffcult. Even though the language is mostly phonemic, it takes a really long time to pronounce its words correctly, it has many silent letters, also many rules and even more exceptions to spelling. Lithuanian has a pitch accent and free, mobile stress in words. The grammar is difficult as well. Word order is free in the sentence, and the same idea can be expressed in many different ways. Nouns, adjectives, and pronouns have seven cases. Lithuanian declension system is one of the most complicated systems among modern Indo-European and modern European languages. The verb has 4 tenses, 3 conjugations, 3 moods, active and passive voice and the gerund. The language retains a rich system of participles, 13 altogether (while English has only 2). Adjectives have 5 degrees of comparison. There are many more complicated features that make Lithuanian hard to learn, not only for the foreign speakers but also for the natives.

Posted by [Renata](#) on Mon, November 29, 2010 7:51:08 PM

I really dispute the fact that a language can be the 'hardest' to learn. Isn't it all relative? Does it not depend on your mother tongue? Yes, languages like Japanese might be difficult for an English speaker. Here it says one of the reasons for the difficulty is the writing systems, particularly the use of kanji- true, an English speaker might struggle with it. But would it be such a struggle for say, a Chinese student who has already got knowledge of these letters/symbols through their native tongue? It also says Polish is difficult due to a case

system (personally as a student of a cased language, I disagree with cases being "difficult" - I adore them!). However, a speaker of another cased language would again, not find it as difficult. And also, would Polish not be easier for a speaker of another Slavic language such as Czech to learn than even English (which, unsurprisingly on this site, scored top in the 'easiest' languages to learn). Estonian- a Finn would find this easier to learn than perhaps an Indo-European language. Do I need to continue?

My point- There is no such thing as the hardest language!

Posted by [Gabriella](#) on Wed, November 24, 2010 9:24:36 PM

I have to agree that Basque is difficult, but also because it has ergative which changes the whole way we build sentences. All the Caucasian languages native to the Caucasus (not imposed from outside) are also as difficult as Finnish, Hungarian and Estonian by having many cases in several of them, plus special consonants, some can have six word classes (as prefix) for verbs and on top of that both split ergativity (which is even harder than in Basque) and one meets so many new words that are not related to other languages.

The Inuit (previously Eskimo) languages like many native languages from the Americas can have also special sounds, different features with lots of suffixes that are new like their words that are usually unrelated to any other language and difficult to pronounce as in Navajo and again ergativity.

The languages from other ethnic groups that have lived on their own for thousands of years can be hard for outsiders to learn like aboriginal Australian and Newguinean languages, Andaman islands, Burushaski (in Pakistan) or even the Khoisan languages from Africa with their clicks. You can try on your own any of these languages I listed here I be prepared to face real challenges! Any Indo-European language (like Spanish, French or Russian) is really easy when compared to any of these exotic languages that usually lack good learning books, newspapers, CD's radio or TV channels to hear or read them.

Posted by [Paul](#) on Wed, November 10, 2010 11:39:03 PM

I think Nepali is also one of the hardest languages because there are many exceptions and vowels to learn. You can write one symbol at least 10 ways!!! So I really think that should be up there.

Posted by [Hannah](#) on Wed, November 3, 2010 11:00:48 PM

What about Czech and Ukrainian ? They also have seven cases.
If you think Polish is difficult, try to learn Sinhalese !

Posted by [Jerzy](#) on Sun, September 12, 2010 4:30:01 PM

I think [Dutch](#) should also be in the hardest 10 since we have numerous exceptions. Also is it hard to form verbs correctly as we work with -d, -t or -dt.

Dutch is a very difficult language

Posted by [Hanne](#) on Wed, August 25, 2010 12:20:36 AM

[Japanese](#) people are expected to learn a bit more than 2000 kanjis (the jouyou kanjis) before leaving high school, and many forget the least used ones. 3000 kanjis is the level of knowledgeable Japanese people.

6000 is the best level of the Japanese kanjis test and is only for kanjis experts who like reading medieval Japanese or something.

Even Chinese people do not need to read 10000 or 15000 kanjis!

Posted by [Luke](#) on Sat, August 21, 2010 12:48:18 AM

There are a few remaining Bolivians fluent in [Kallawaya](#), a mysterious language linked to the practice of healing rites. It is passed down culturally from adults to teen healers. If you are not a linguist, you probably haven't heard of it. If you are anything but a chosen healer, you will never get to use it, or even need it.

Posted by [Reg](#) on Fri, August 20, 2010 3:31:13 PM

If taken literally, the hardest languages for outsiders to learn would be those that are currently unknown by outsiders, for example, [Sentinelese](#). Sentinelese is completely unattested, and no Sentinelese have had significant contact with outsiders for several centuries, so it cannot be learned anywhere but on North Sentinel Island. However, it is illegal for anyone to visit the island, and fishermen accidentally visiting have been killed by the Sentinelese.

*I recommended the list above however.

Posted by [Nathan](#) on 07/15/10, 10:09 AM



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